1 May 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Henry A. Kissinger

FROM : James R. Schlesinger

Attached is the memorandum on political changes in the Soviet Union which you asked us for at the Verification Panel on Friday. I have had it prepared as a memorandum for the President, in case you wish to show it to him.

In essence, it argues that the changes solidify Brezhnev's position and ratify his pursuit of detente. In so doing, they put him in a strong position to argue his case in Washington and Bonn for the major expansion in economic relations which the goals he has set require.

JAMES R. SCHLESINGER
Director
Central Intelligence Agency

1 May 1973
OCI No. 1646/73

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM : James R. Schlesinger

SUBJECT : Implications of Changes in the Soviet Politburo

Summary

The changes in the Politburo announced by the Central Committee meeting on 27 April were timed to enhance General Secretary Brezhnev's authority in his forthcoming meetings with you and Chancellor Brandt. The elevation to the Politburo of Defense Minister Grechko, Foreign Minister Gromyko, and KGB chief Andropov, together with the ouster of Shelest, was intended as a signal that the leadership's course, symbolized by detente and cooperation with the West, commands the support of all major constituencies in the USSR.

The Central Committee decisions suggest that Brezhnev, in his visits to Washington and Bonn, will press for a major expansion of economic and technological cooperation. In his recent conversation with seven US Senators, Brezhnev urged that both governments cast aside old cold war approaches and seek new areas of cooperation. His emphasis on a new "epoch" in economic relations was aimed at strengthening his plea for large-scale deals involving Western capital and technology and Soviet raw materials. Brezhnev also stressed that the "unlimited possibilities for economic cooperation" will require top-level political decisions.

Brezhnev's preoccupation with large-scale deals with the West reflects his recognition that the realities of domestic economic problems and of the changing international environment leave the USSR no satisfactory alternative to its present Western orientation. He has made some fundamental policy choices which would be difficult to reverse without exposing his leadership position to grave, and possibly fatal, damage.

Although Brezhnev now appears to be committed more deeply than ever to a policy of detente, this of course does not mean that the Soviets will retreat from the vigorous prosecution of their global rivalry with the US. The Politburo changes, moreover, will not enable him to disregard the continuing skepticism of detente among powerful interests in the USSR. The fact that the KGB and the Defense Ministry now have a full vote on national policy may, in time, slow further progress on detente.

The Central Committee decisions do not appear to foreshadow any meaningful change in Moscow's attitude toward Indochina. Although the Soviets will be willing to urge North Vietnam to comply with the Paris agreements, they will not risk losing their limited leverage in Hanoi by applying significant pressure. To the extent that China limits its support for North Vietnam, however, the Soviets probably will follow a similar course, thus avoiding both damage to their Western policy and to their position vis-a-vis Peking and Hanoi.

The changes in the Politburo announced by the Central Committee meeting on 27 April were timed to enhance General Secretary Brezhnev's authority in his forthcoming meetings with you and Chancellor Brandt. The bestowal of full Politburo membership upon Defense Minister Grechko, KGB chief Andropov, and Foreign Minister Gromyko, together with the ouster of Shelest, was intended as a signal to all segments of Soviet society that the leadership's present course, symbolized by detente and cooperation with the West, commands the support of all major constituencies. The Central Committee adopted a resolution that instructed the Politburo to pursue the "peace program" in a manner that will make favorable changes in the international situation "irreversible." It also emphasized Brezhnev's personal contributions to the success of this policy. Brezhnev was careful to arrange to have that zealous old ideologist, Mikhail Suslov, join Kosygin and Podgorny in endorsing the detente policy. (For more detail on internal political implications, see Annex).

Brezhnev's report on foreign affairs, in keeping with established practice, probably will not be published in full, but the principal points probably covered the same ground treated briefly in the most recent public top level utterance--the Lenin anniversary speech by Politburo alternate member Ustinov on 20 April. Ustinov characterized the US-Soviet summit talks last May as "a turning point in the normalization of relations," described prospects for SALT II in a guardedly optimistic tone, and held out the promise of "significant new steps" in Soviet-US relations.

The Central Committee decisions suggest that Brezhnev, in his visits to Washington and Bonn, intends to press for an expansion of economic and technological cooperation. Ustinov declared that "the development of relations of peaceful coexistence implies the expansion of constructive cooperation in the economic, scientific-technical and cultural fields." The most significant clue to the scope of the enterprise the Soviet leaders have in mind, however, was articulated by Brezhnev himself in his three-hour and forty-minute conversation with seven US Senators on 23 April.

Brezhnev made a case for a major departure from long-standing assumptions regarding the nature and potential of Soviet-American economic intercourse. He contended that the "ideological cast of thought of the cold war days" constitutes the only significant obstacle to what he termed a new type of economic integration and cooperation. He urged that both governments cast aside old approaches and think in terms of new concepts, actively seeking areas for cooperation that would rest on "an epoch of new forms of economic ties."

This new epoch, as he described it, will be the product of new techniques of production possessed by all developed nations--techniques that have "placed before all nations certain unavoidable factors" that prompt them to broaden their attitudes toward economic relations. Brezhnev argued that

scientific-technological integration, regardless of differing social systems, will propel advanced nations into cooperative activities whether they like it or not.

This discourse on an inevitable new "epoch" was intended to strengthen Brezhnev's plea to the Senators for large-scale deals involving Western capital and technology and Soviet raw materials. To advance down this road, he argued, long-term credit arrangements (up to 40-50 years) will be essential. He asserted that there are "literally unlimited possibilities for economic cooperation." In emphasizing the need for long-term credits, Brezhnev contended that they are essential for "rational planning" not only in the USSR but in Western countries.

This vision of unlimited economic integration led Brezhnev to his final point--that top-level political decisions will be indispensable if the glowing promise of a new age is to be realized. The arithmetic, he said, could be left to computers and technicians, but responsible political leaders must set the course toward the new epoch and determine what is "major and what is minor." (The "minor" was intended in this conversation to apply to US concern over the emigration tax on Soviet Jews).

Although Brezhnev was obviously indulging in hyperbole for the benefit of the Senators, this exposition can be taken as a reliable measure of his priorities, both in his forthcoming meetings with you and Chancellor Brandt and in the foreseeable future. Brezhnev stressed to the Senators that the Soviet leadership is determined to follow the path set by the summit agreements last May. His vision of a new epoch in Soviet-Western economic relations clearly is the product of the leadership's recognition that the realities of domestic economic problems and of the changing international environment leave the USSR no satisfactory alternative to its present Western orientation.

Economic incentives for cooperation with the West have, if anything, increased since the detente course was chartered by the 24th Party Congress. Moscow is faced in 1973 and beyond with serious economic problems. The Soviets are concerned about the political and military implications of their long-term inability to keep pace with the West in the scientific-technological revolution. With the overall economic growth rate declining (2 percent in 1972) and with ever rising expectations from an increasingly sophisticated Soviet society, Brezhnev has made a series of fundamental policy choices, primarily on questions of economic policy, that would be difficult to reverse without exposing his leadership position to grave, and possibly fatal, damage.

Although Brezhnev now appears to be committed more deeply than ever to a policy of detente, this of course does not mean that the Soviets will retreat from the vigorous prosecution of their global rivalry with the US for influence and prestige. Their persistent efforts to undermine US influence in the Middle East, for example, through both diplomatic action and KGB operations, show no signs of diminishing. Nor has there been any indication of a slowdown in high priority strategic weapons programs.

The changes in the Politburo, moreover, will not enable Brezhnev to disregard the continuing skepticism of detente and fears of its effects among powerful constituencies in the USSR. The presence of Grechko and Andropov on the Politburo, in fact, will give the entrenched defense and KGB bureaucracies a potentially stronger voice in the highest leadership councils.

Grechko's elevation to the Politburo, for example, could make it increasingly difficult for us to persuade the USSR to accept MIRV restrictions. Although a proponent of a balanced defense posture, as contrasted to the one-sided emphasis on strategic weaponry during the Khrushchev years, Grechko will be representing the interests of the military as a

whole, including the powerful strategic forces lobby. The longer he remains in office, the greater the extent to which his votes will reflect the views of his constituents, rather than his debts to Brezhnev and the others who approved his being seated on the Politburo.

The economic problems that underline Moscow's detente strategy are reinforced by the leadership's anxieties regarding the changing shape of international alignments. A case could be made that the Soviets have exaggerated the long-term hazards for Soviet power and interests in the rapprochement between the US and China, and between China and Japan and other industrialized nations. But the long history of Russian isolation and inferiority continues to exert a powerful influence in conditioning Soviet perceptions, and these emotional ingredients in Soviet decision making seem likely to play an even more prominent role in shaping Soviet policy to deal with the emergence of China as a major actor on the world scene.

The Central Committee decisions and the general Soviet posture as reflected in recent pronouncements do not appear to foreshadow any meaningful change in Moscow's attitude toward Indochina. Ustinov's speech rehearsed the standard line that the Paris agreements registered a "truly historic" victory for the Vietnamese Communists and for the entire socialist world. He reaffirmed the USSR's intention to support Hanoi and the PRG in their aspiration to "ensure the fulfillment of the Paris agreements and fulfill the national hopes of the Vietnamese people."

The Soviets probably will be willing to encourage North Vietnam to live up to the cease-fire agreement, but they do not have much leverage in Hanoi and they will not want to lose what they have by applying significant pressure. To the extent that China limits its support for North Vietnam, however, the Soviets probably will do the same, and thus hope to avoid both damage to their Western policy and to their position in the triangular Moscow-Peking-Hanoi relationship.

ANNEX

Personnel Changes at the Plenum

The list of speakers who took part in the discussion following Brezhnev's report had the look of a national mandate.

--President Podgorny, Premier Kosygin, and chief ideologist party secretary Suslov, joined with regional leaders in the discussion, a significant departure from past practice.

--while this type of participation tended to highlight the widening gap between their standing and Brezhnev's, it nonetheless lent added authority to what Brezhnev had to say.

--every major geographic area of the Soviet Union was represented in a speech by a party leader.

--Marshall Grechko spoke for the armed forces and KGB chief Andropov spoke for the security forces. These are the two most important institutions besides the party and the government apparatus which was represented by Premier Kosygin.

The new members of the Politburo have worked closely with Brezhnev and have been involved in his detente program. Indeed, they have often attended Politburo meetings as expert advisers.

--Brezhnev has maintained a personal relationship with Grechko in particular. This was especially apparent at the plenum held on the eve of President Nixon's trip to Moscow, when Shelest was demoted for, among other things, apparently opposing the Summit. Grechko spoke on Brezhnev's foreign policy report.

--bringing Grechko into the Politburo strengthens Brezhnev's hand domestically on military negotiations like SALT and MBFR. It reassures the Soviet people that the military know, contribute to, and support Soviet policy in this area.

--Gromyko and Andropov are apparently more neutral figures in terms of personal relationships, but Brezhnev has worked well with them. Gromyko, of course, has unequalled experience in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy. Andropov, a long-time party functionary, has sought to appear as apolitical as possible, as is required by his sensitive position.

The Central Committee also approved the promotion of Grigory Romanov, party boss of the Leningrad area, to candidate member of the Politburo. His promotion is also a plus for Brezhnev, though a less important one than the others.

--the Leningrad party organization played a stormy role in Moscow politics under Stalin and has rarely been represented in the Politburo in the last two decades. The local party organization is a strong one, and has resented its exclusion from the center.

--Vasily Tolstikov, the previous party boss in Leningrad, apparently rubbed people in Moscow, including Brezhnev, the wrong way, and was exiled as Ambassador in Peking in 1970.

--since then, Brezhnev has cultivated the Leningrad organization and Romanov, Tolstikov's deputy who was promoted to fill his shoes.

--Romanov has expressed his support for Brezhnev, while the latter has countenanced some of the economic organizational schemes popular in Leningrad, among them the associations of enterprises which represent the heart of the national reorganization of industrial management announced earlier this month.

The two leaders who were removed from the Politburo and retired, Shelest, aged 65, and Voronov, aged 62, had previously been demoted to positions that did not warrant their continued membership, and both had tangled with Brezhnev on a number of issues. In a certain sense, howeyer,

their ousters suggest a political trade-off. Shelest has seemed to stand at the conservative end of the Kremlin political spectrum and Voronov at the moderate end. Their retirements were, of course, unfinished business from a year to two years ago, but it has been characteristic of Brezhnev to move very slowly and cautiously in personnel matters.

Beyond the personalities involved, the changes enhance the status of important institutions at the leadership level. This should not cause any immediate changes in policy, since all three of the new members have worked so closely with the leadership in the past. They now, however, enjoy a leadership position beyond the institutions they represent and have a vote on policy decisions instead of only the ears of top leaders. In the past, representation of the military and of the KGB on the Politburo has been a sensitive issue.

--the military have not been represented since Defense Minister Zhukov's brief term on the Presidium in 1957.

--the KGB has not been represented for 20 years, since Beria's execution.

--the Foreign Ministry has not been represented since Molotov's decline in 1956. This ministry, of course, is not as powerful an interest group, but Gromyko's elevation will tend to strengthen its voice in foreign policy relative to that of the Central Committee apparatus and Brezhnev's own staff.

The Politburo with 16 full members remains overlarge by traditional standards. Moreover, it lacks a tie-breaking vote, a situation the Soviets have tried to avoid in the past. At least two members, Shelepin, aged 54, and Polyansky, aged 55, have experienced demotions in their careers similar to those suffered by Shelest and Voronov, and remain politically vulnerable. Moreover, the median age of the leadership has been raised, not lowered, by the addition of the new members. Marshal Grechko is 70, Foreign Minister Gromyko is 64, and KGB chief Andropov is 58. Now that Brezhnev has made a beginning, he will probably make additional adjustments.